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General Federation of Trade Unions,

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Trade Unions and the War.

Manifesto to its Members and to its Affiliations in Europe and America.

In Germany and in Austria, and also in the neutral States of Europe and America, persistent attempts are being made to misrepresent the attitude of the British Labour movement towards the Government, and towards the crisis through which Europe is passing. Extracts from speeches and cuttings from newspapers are collated, and conclusions drawn which cannot be justified by facts, and which do not represent the real opinion of the British working-class movement.

Under such circumstances, an organisation like the General Federation of Trade Unions, which represents, and is to a great extent interested in the financial stability of 1,006,904 Trade Unionists, must remove all doubt concerning its own position and intention.

It cannot better begin this task than by stating that it is, and always has been, on the side of international as well as industrial peace. It has consistently tried to develop fraternity between peoples of different nationalities: it early identified itself with the international Trade Union movement, attended its Congresses, contributed to its upkeep, and endeavoured to extend its influence. With the General Federation and its members, faith in the common interests of working humanity, and determination to advance them, was warm and strong, while the possibility of war was regarded as one regards the shadow of an indescribable catastrophe.

The Federation entertains no delusions concerning the consequences of war, or the share of these which the class it represents will bear, and in placing its position before the world it is actuated only by the desire to prevent misapprehension, and to secure effective national and ordered consideration of all those interests it directly or indirectly represents.

To fully analyse and discuss the causes of the war and the responsibility for its outbreak is beyond the intention of the Management Committee. Sufficient for the moment to say that, in the opinion of millions of Trade Unionists, the responsibility for the war does not rest upon the policy or conduct of Great Britain.

This opinion is supported from our own side by documentary evidence, and by the fact of our own unpreparedness, and from the opposing side by the utterances of their soldiers, their statesmen, and their teachers, and by their terrible and immediate capacity for striking effective and terrorising blows.

Of this capacity to strike the Press of the world has, since the beginning of August, borne daily testimony. The intention to strike whenever and wherever opportunity offered has been openly and generally expressed, and was facilitated by the fact that the German Army is in effect always mobilised.

The following quotations from German writers represent not merely the opinions of Bernardi and the teachings of Treitschke, but the considered conclusions of the dominant section of their countrymen:—

> "The idea that the weak nation is to have the same right to live as the powerful and vigorous nations represents a presumptuous encroachment on the natural laws of development."—VON BERNARDI.

"Our people (the Germans) must learn to see that the maintenance of peace never can or may be the goal of a policy."—VON BERNARDI.

"Such theories only too clearly disseminate the false and ruinous notion that the maintenance of peace is the ultimate object, or at least the chief duty of our policy. To such views, the offspring of a false humanity, the clear and definite answer must be made that, under certain circumstances, it is not only the right but the moral duty of a statesman to bring about a war."—VON BERNARDI.

Of Frederick the Great it is said: "None of the wars which he fought had been forced upon him; none of them did he postpone as long as possible. He always determined to be the aggressor, to anticipate his opponents, and to secure for himself favourable prospects of success."—VON BERNARDI.

"The acts of the State cannot be judged by the standard of individual morality. The end-all and be-all of a State is power, and he who is not man enough to look this truth in the face should not meddle in politics."—TREITSCHKE.

"It was war which laid the foundation of Prussia's power."—VON BERNARDI.

"In the business of war men must not regard the massacres, the battles, the burnings, and the marches; they must look at the business of war with the eyes of men. . . . . It will be shown that it is a business, divine in itself, and as needful and necessary to the world as eating and drinking or any other work."—LUTHER.

No comment on these utterances is proposed, their significance is obvious, and their influence has been apparent at Louvain and Rheims. Concerning the preparations for war it is difficult and, perhaps, futile for the non-military mind to speak, but even to the non-military mind the feverish activity of men who during June swarmed and worked like ants on the strategic railways of Germany had a sinister significance, and strengthened the impression that, however peaceful the desires of the German people might be, their masters had already determined on war.

It is obvious that the immediate participation of Britain in the war was neither desired nor expected; her day would gladly have been postponed. Loyalty to herself, to her best traditions, and to her treaty obligations made abstention from the conflict impossible, and to-day her people, especially her workpeople, are determined to support not only the neutrality of heroic Belgium, but the honour of nations and the inviolability of treaties.

Once involved in such a war, the duty of the movement stood out clearly. It became necessary, apart from all personal considerations of friendship, to offer the fiercest resistance to the aggressor, and to make any sacrifice necessary to bring the war to a definite and honourable conclusion, to join with others in making the fullest provision for this policy, to see that the political circumstances arising were used to develop and broaden national life and outlook, and particularly to insist that the economic and moral disabilities of war should not fall altogether on the shoulders of the poor.

A real love of country inspired the leaders of the people to ask of the manhood they represented the greatest of all sacrifices. In acting so there was no desire to arouse or develop racial animosities, but there was a general determination to prevent in this country the outrages on women and children, and the massacres and burnings which have desolated both Belgium and Northern France.

Not less imperative than the problems of national defence are those problems which affect the political and economic life of the State during the war, and which will continue to affect it long after the war is over. The consideration of these does not imply hostility or lack of patriotism; it simply indicates foresight and a desire to turn the extraordinary circumstances of the war to national account. Some of the problems which affected

transport and the public services have been dealt with on communal lines. Under the stress of war, the Government assumed control of the railways and fixed maximum food prices; the impossibilities of years became actualities in an hour when the alternative was national disaster. The lessons learned in the hour of danger must not be lost, but improved upon, and return to anarchic methods must be strenuously fought. If railways can be nationally and effectively controlled, co-ordinated, and worked under abnormal war conditions, they can be so dealt with under the easier conditions obtaining in times of peace.

War has compelled the Government to give practical effect to the admission, long made verbally, that the State was responsible for the physical efficiency of its units, and measures of relief have been planned. The Management Committee is certain that these measures are altogether inadequate, and cannot meet the situation. The Management Committee also insists that works of relief must be also works of utility. Nothing so discourages men as to find that their work is without intrinsic value or use; nothing so infects so-called "relief" with the taint of pauperism. The pamphlet on "Unemployment" published by the Management Committee in 1911 suggests examples of useful and co-ordinated work.

The Government has paid for the material things it required for the war, it has extended its financial assistance and credit to banks and private concerns, and it would act illogically if it hesitated to meet the demand for payment for that human element, without which States cannot exist or wars be made. Surely if the human element voluntarily places itself at the service of the State, it is the duty of any Government to pay for this at least as fairly as it paid for its coal and its corn.

Great Britain is the richest country on earth, yet she largely depends upon charity for the care and comfort of her discharged soldiers and sailors. The biggest effort yet made in this direction is totally inadequate; even the Prince of Wales' Fund, large as it seems to the thoughtless, can only relieve a tithe of the distress which already exists. In this war the men at the top of the social scale have given their lives freely, and it would be ungenerous not to give credit for, and express appreciation of, their gallantry and self-sacrifice. The workman, too, at the call of his country has left his job and his home and is doing his share, and doing it voluntarily, but there is a large percentage of the comfortable class whose main contributions during this crisis have been in the nature of criticism and advice. It is these who must be made to contribute, and to contribute regularly and in proportion to means. If one-half of last year's increased profits upon industry and commerce could be exacted by means of a special income tax the totals of all the voluntary funds would be instantly eclipsed, and the basis of a practicable fund provided.

It is necessary at once to withdraw from the realm of chance and charity the interests of the soldier and his dependents. For ages writers and poets have joined in singing the praises of soldiers, extolling their sacrifices, and glorifying their prowess. Times have changed, and to-day there is a Labour movement, dissatisfied with mere vocal effort and strong enough, and also wise enough, to see that the soldier receives more than adulation in life and laurels in death. To leave him or his dependents to the care of charity is unworthy of a great nation. Inquisitorial methods and voluntary effort must give place to specific scales of pay and proper public State control.

Reform in the Army itself must be pressed, particularly in the direction of increasing allowances and facilitating promotion from the ranks. An immediate minimum of £1 per week is not too much to ask for soldiers or sailors who are wholly or partially disabled by wounds or disease contracted on active service. There is also need for more humane treatment of the dependents of men who die of disease, similarly contracted, shortly after discharge. The fact that these reforms will cost money should not retard their institution. We believe in a voluntary Army; we expect it to cost

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more per head than if it were obtained by conscription; we believe also that the relationship of the Army to the State needs overhauling, and a Royal Commission, including representatives of Labour with personal and first-hand knowledge of Labour conditions and needs should be appointed now.

The co-ordination of existing charities and relief funds is imperative. Already in London much has been done to prevent the waste and overlapping consequent upon the multiplicity of organisations, but much remains to be done, and it will be done better and more sympathetically if organised Labour co-operates.

Amongst the voluntary associations which may justly demand consideration at the moment the Trade Unions stand pre-eminent. Some have made magnificent efforts to meet the distress consequent upon unemployment, but they cannot indefinitely continue their disbursements. The contributions and benefits were calculated on a peace basis. They never attempted to secure, nor could they have secured had the attempt been made, contributions equal to the requirements developed by a great war. The collapse of their efforts would mean more than Trade Union humiliation and bankruptcy, it would mean national disaster. Subsidies have already been promised and given. These must be extended and increased, and wherever Trade Unions have securities not easily realisable these should be taken over, where request is made, by the State and the unions given the equivalent in cash.

The sickness and disablement which will follow upon the war must disturb the actuarial equilibrium of most approved societies, and these should combine to secure themselves from the disaster which threatens unless the State shoulders at least that part of the burden arising from the war.

In the furtherance of all these objects the Management Committee is prepared to act with all the force and influence at its command, and it invites the co-operation of all persons or organisations who desire to realise the objects set forth. In explaining its position and advancing the claims of the people it wishes to avoid the folly of the Chauvinist and the meanness of the merchant who haggles while death waits at the door: it speaks only in the discharge of its duty, and it is certain of the co-operation of those who were responsible for its election. It does not overlook its obligations to the workers in other lands, and it hopes that with the destruction of the Prussian militarist caste, which for 40 years has worked for war, international friendships and efforts may be renewed, but for the moment its whole duty lies at home.

Signed by the Management Committee:—

J. O'Grady, M.P. (Chairman), Furnishing Trades Association.
Joseph Cross, J.P. (Vice-Chairman), Northern Counties Weavers.
John Ward, M.P. (Treasurer), Navvies, Builders, and General Labourers.
Jas. Crinion, J.P. (Trustee), Amalgamated Card and Blowing Room Operatives.
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Ben Cooper, Cigar Makers' Mutual Association.
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